

VZCZCXRO7701
PP RUEHBZ RUEHGI
DE RUEHGI #0021/01 0411946
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 101946Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY BANGUI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0826
INFO RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA PRIORITY 0057
RUEHBZ/AMEMBASSY BRAZZAVILLE PRIORITY 0113
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY 0078
RUEHJB/AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA PRIORITY 0065
RUEHCO/AMEMBASSY COTONOU PRIORITY 0051
RUEHDR/AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM PRIORITY 0046
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0094
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA PRIORITY 0090
RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM PRIORITY 0216
RUEHLGB/AMEMBASSY KIGALI PRIORITY 0065
RUEHKI/AMEMBASSY KINSHASA PRIORITY 0225
RUEHLC/AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE PRIORITY 0126
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0080
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI PRIORITY 0116
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0387
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0111
RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE PRIORITY 0377
RUEHGI/AMEMBASSY BANGUI 1022
RUEHNJ/AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA PRIORITY 0400

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGUI 000021

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

AF/C FOR SSARDAR, MASHRAF, SLOPEZ, KWYCOFF; PARIS FOR RKANEDA;
LONDON FOR PLORD; YAOUNDE FOR POL/ECON
STATE FOR OPS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [CT](#)

SUBJECT: NEW REPORTS OF VIOLENT CLASHES IN NORTH-CENTRAL CAR

REF: 09 BANGUI 12

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: For the last two months, Post has been following the movements of a group of armed men who attacked various villages in the north-central provinces of the Central African Republic (CAR). These attacks were initially dismissed by commentators in Bangui as being merely unimportant 'ethnic' clashes in a country where the major conflict is political. Additional information leads us to fear that this round of violence may be far more important than initial thought. While some of our information is little better than rumors, we are hearing of the familiar patterns of village burnings, civilian killings, major disruptions in the diamond trade, and direct challenges to the central government (CARG). While it is clear that perhaps as many as 3,000 Central Africans have fled to Chad, the reports of 10,000 new refugees are unlikely as that number exceeds the number of known inhabitants in the area. Post is organizing site visits and will report further. END SUMMARY

2. (SBU) REFTEL traced the movement of an armed band from Sam Ouandja through Bria to Ndele and attempted to sort out the players. While REFTEL reported that things are calm in the Ndele area, the latest word from international non-governmental groups (NGO) is that fighting has resumed. It is specifically reported that some twenty civilians were killed when the FACA burned the village of Sokoumba, north of Ndele. If this is true, then it indicates a frightening return to the failed FACA tactics of 2006 which ultimately resulted in the displacement of as many as 300,000 Central Africans. There is reporting from Chad of the arrival of some three thousand Rounga refugees from CAR. The reports of up to 10,000 refugees are unlikely to be correct as that exceeds the known population of the area. Beyond crossing over to Chad, most of the displacement is believed to follow the traditional pattern, seen elsewhere in the CAR, of fleeing into the bush on the far side of cultivated fields.

¶3. (SBU) There is new information on some of the underlying causes of this conflict. According to various reports, the Rounga controlled the diamond trade in all directions from the town of Ouadda, to specifically include Sam Ouandja and Bria. When Damane Zacharia, the UFDR rebel leader and an ethnic Goula, signed a peace agreement with the CARG he did not make an adequate payment to the Rounga, and worse, drove them from the diamond fields. This split is said to have been brewing since ¶2006. At some point, they reached out to both Rounga allies and those in several other groups (Kara, Mandja) in Sudan for money and weapons. This resulted in the December 2008 attacks on Sam Ouandja and near Bria; raids to seal weapons from the FACA and the Gendarmes.

¶4. (SBU) Upon their arrival in the Ndele area the rebels clashed with the FACA. Reports are that the Sultan attempted to defuse the situation, but the CARG has taken a hard line. President Bozize delivered a strong warning in the Sango portion of his World Food Day speech in Ndele and the former Minister of the Interior and now presidential advisor to the president commented to the DCM, 'We will resolve this by force.' According to unconfirmed but credible reports by NGOs, it appears that that 'force' has begun.

¶5. (SBU) About two months ago, the CARG quietly shut down eight of the twelve licensed diamond dealers in the CAR. Their directors were all placed under de facto house arrest. Publicly, the reason given was that they had not yet constructed headquarters buildings 'for the benefit of the state.' (Sic) The latest rumor is now that they were shut down in an attempt to deny the Rounga a means of raising money through the sale of diamonds. Should this be true, it is a strong indication of how seriously the Bozize government takes this threat.

BANGUI 00000021 002 OF 002

¶6. (SBU) This movement into Chad and the bush poses problems for humanitarian relief as these populations are a long way from any relief bases in Chad - they are, in fact, much more supportable from the CAR side. The United Nations and the various relief organizations in both the CAR and Chad are scrambling both to provide immediate assistance and to assess the scope of the problem.

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT: While we most emphatically do not/not want to cry 'Wolf!' post takes the events of the last month very seriously and are making every effort to determine the truth. If this is indeed the beginning of a serious new rebellion, it brings with it nasty new overtones of ethnic and religious conflict - neither of which has been a major factor in the CAR to date, and could destabilize or destroy the fragile peace that holds through much of the CAR. END COMMENT
COOK ##